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Were WOOFERS Not Dogs

By Christopher Ford (c.ford@mcrmail.com)

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Ruapehu Farm Stay - New Zealand
Farm Stay

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WERE WOOFERS NOT DOGS

Traveling doesn't come cheap. Even with a very strong pound and a stern budget I still crossed my fingers and prayed waiting for cash at each ATM I visited. I'd been away from home 5 months to date, jumped off, climbed up, and swam through, every piece of land, rock, and stretch of water in New Zealand. It was time to give back a little of what I'd taken, and take back a little of what I'd spent.

Backpacking notice boards and hostel hearsay persuaded me to travel north to Ohakune, North Island, New Zealand. My reason for coming, to WOOF: that is to be a Willing Worker on an Organic Farm. Four weeks of intensive farming, in exchange for 3 home cooked meals and a bed. A chance to rebuild my connection to mother earth, live the organic life, and more importantly, preserve enough money for a skydive in Taupo.

Although Ohakune is large enough to export world famous carrots and skiing, it is still yet to discover the merits of public transport. With my thumb outstretched, and sporting my best `pick me up I'm not a psychopath smile' I called upon the good will of passing motorists to get me the extra 3km south to the farm, my destination.

Sadly, as it transpired, that's exactly what the passing motorists did. Pass me by. One car became two, and 78 became a joke. A few cars away from my thumb becoming the finger, I started to walk.

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4km on, braving more rain than I thought existed, I swung open the white picket gate, sent my backpack to the ground, and introduced myself to the host. The person on the other end of my arm was Sue Allomes; teacher, foster mother, and all round matriarch. She briefly showed me around the farm, to my accommodation, and once introductions to the other workers and animals were made, dinner was served.

The accommodation was a caravan. I can't find a better word than grim to describe it. Electricity, gas, or running water hadn't been seen since the mould arrived in the late 80's. I entered nonetheless and fought back the stench to get a closer look. The only reason the roof wasn't gushing water was because the rain had since stopped. Still, I pinned a postcard on the wall, prayed for a drought, and called it home. Caravan #4, Ruapehu Homestead, New Zealand.

The main income for the farm comes from the horse trekking business they operate that runs a 3-hr guided trek across the scenic Ruapehu district. Also offered was a selection of lodge accommodation, and country dining in the restaurant. The WOOFERS were responsible for maintaining, cleaning and the general upkeep of everything inside the picket fence. First impressions were good. I was eager to hang up my compass and reach for the elbow grease.

Routine soon concreted itself into our day. We groomed and fed the horses not long after ourselves and set about the daily chores with the fresh enthusiasm each day. Bread was to be baked, fences to be fixed, and weeds weeded. Simplistic in theory yet pathetically executed in practice. In the first week alone, I was responsible for all the inedible bread in the house, destroying 3 fence posts, and digging up the all the broccoli in one vegetable patch. I then decided to do what any other person worth their salt would do: deny it. "Come to think of it Sue, I did see the new German girl leaning on the fence yesterday".

In addition to this, I set about inadvertently electrocuting myself on the paddock fence more times than I care to remember. Organic farming was proving to be test that no university education could prepare me for, and my appreciation of farmers soared.

The work was hard, but faking delight when meals were plated up was harder. Our meals came from the garden and drinking water from the sky. I'd enjoyed the benefits of drive thru's since Grease was playing in the drive in's and longed for a Mc'Anthing. The cook had two philosophies, 'We need to be sustainable and eat the food we grow', which I understood, and 'WOOFER's will eat anything', which I despised. True to her word, we would and we did, but never by choice. "I'll pass on the rack of lamb thanks, just dish me up some of that disgusting looking cabbage bake and some rainwater in a glass, Ta".

Food was something we spooned into our mouth, chewed, swallowed and digested. Carbohydrates were always on the menu, carbs equaled energy, and energy equaled fixed fences and weed-less vegetable patches. Everything that could be eaten was. Any food left over from the WOOFER's was given to the cats, and any food the cats refused was fed to the chickens, although the order of which I still remain skeptical. We'd collect chicken eggs, rip up spring onions and siphon water from the gutters to continue the cycle of farm life.

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The horses, however, lived outside this cycle. They ate carrots, literally by the lorry load, and when the lorry was empty they turned to the grass. We'd feed them and they'd belt us with their hooves as a way of saying thanks. They would also bite, nut, and stamp on impulse. With one between my legs I felt the next stop was nearly always the ground, and the ground was far. `Just get up, and get back on its easy', `There is a reason he's bucking me off'. Horses are unquestionable beautiful and handled correctly probably receptive. But my relationship with them started with the first shin kick and probably won't continue past spreading manure on the garden.

Still the cycle continued. The work list never shortened and I was using more salt and pepper on my meals than ever. Progress and recognition were never achieved nor given and I soon felt drained and unwanted. This raw approach to life I'd craved a month prior was beating me. Operating such a self-sufficient lifestyle was very admirable, but I yearned for a glass of water that didn't taste of the roof and a bed with a mattress thicker than the duvet.

I'd learned many skills, formed new friendships and put to bed any horse riding desires I had. I'd eaten my weight in carrot bread, could spot a Christmas fern from poison ash and tie a Flemish hitch faster

than most boy scouts. But, it was time say goodbye to the gang and farewell to Mother Earth. I scrawled Taupo on a sheet of cardboard and picked up my bag.

None

The Truth About Taking Your Dog To The Dog Park

By Adam Katz

This idea of taking your dog to a dog park is not a good one. Why?

Because:

#1) It's not natural for the dog. We're not talking about human children who need to be socialized with other kids throughout their infancy. Dogs learn dominant and submissive behavior and how to interact with other dogs from 6 to 8 weeks of age. This two week period is called a critical stage, and a small amount of exposure will have a lasting effect on your dog's personality.

When you throw your dog in with all kinds of other dogs (from other packs) the first thing they need to do is establish who's dominant and who's submissive. And yes, they'll tussle to do this, often. If you have two really dominant dogs, they may even fight to the death. Or if another dog gets flushed too quickly, he'll get defensive. And then you have a dog fight on your hands, with hundreds of dogs and owners yelling and running around screaming.... and none of the dogs are trained... and none of the dogs are on leash... and all of the owners don't know anything about dog handling (esp. a fight) but think they know everything. Trust me... it's a bad situation you need to avoid.

#2) Health: They let anyone into those dog parks. And believe you me, you get the types who will find a

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dog in an alley and before giving it shots (rabies, parvo, etc..) ... they think they're doing a great thing by bringing the dog to the dog park where he can cough, lick and breathe on your dog.

#3) Temperament: Nobody does a temperament test on these dogs before letting them into the park. Duh! You're playing with fire.

So you can see, there are a lot of risks. And just because the dog gets into a dominance scuffle, does not mean that he's a dog fighter. But that's a different issue for another article.

That's all for now, folks! Adam

Adam G. Katz is the author of the book, "Secrets of a Professional Dog Trainer: An Insider's Guide To The Most Jealously Guarded Dog Training Secrets In History." Get a free copy of his report "Games To Play With Your Dog" when you sign up for his free weekly dog training tips e-zine at:



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